



Morning Alert - Monday, October 24, 2016

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HEADLINES

Morning news

All TV networks led with reports on a series of explosions in Utsunomiya, Tochigi, on Sunday, killing a 72-year-old former SDF officer and injuring three other people. Police suspect that the former SDF officer set off the explosions to commit suicide. Major front-page items in national papers included the explosions in Utsunomiya, AT&T's agreement to buy Time Warner, and the victory of LDP candidates in of Sunday's by-elections in Tokyo and Fukuoka.

POLITICS

LDP candidates win big in two by-elections

All papers wrote that the LDP candidates in Sunday's by-elections in Tokyo and Fukuoka won landslide victories. According to the papers, their success will boost the foundation of Prime Minister Abe, who will probably continue to pursue the dissolution of the Lower House for a snap election in January. The administration was particularly pleased with the results given that an LDP-backed candidate was routed by an anti-nuclear energy candidate supported by the four opposition parties in the Niigata gubernatorial election only a week ago. Yomiuri wrote that the premier is likely to use his political capital to pass the TPP legislation at an early date and win concessions over the Northern Territories dispute from Russian President Putin in December with the ultimate goal of clinching a victory in the proposed general election.

However, other papers said some LDP officials are not as jubilant because the candidate in Tokyo prevailed primarily because of his close bonds with extremely popular Tokyo Governor Koike, while the triumphant candidate in the Fukuoka race was the second son of Kunio Hatoyama, whose death

in June was the reason the election was held in the first place. The fact that Finance Minister Aso and Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga, key government officials, were sharply at odds over who to support in the Fukuoka poll is also a worrisome development.

Meanwhile, the Democratic Party has been put in a difficult position as the dismal election performance by its candidates has shown that the largest opposition party may need to rely on the Japanese Communist Party and other opposition groups to outperform the ruling coalition in future elections. In the by-election campaigns, the DP tried not to reach out to other opposition parties for support due to strong criticism from some party lawmakers and its biggest supporter, the Japanese Trade Union Confederation (Rengo), of growing election cooperation with the JCP. Disgruntled DP politicians are becoming increasingly skeptical about Renho's leadership as party president since she was elected in September to help draw attention to the party's candidates in elections.

Komeito eases opposition to casino bill

Yomiuri wrote that the junior ruling party Komeito appears to be growing flexible about the legislation to legalize gambling perhaps in order to prevent the LDP from deepening collaboration with the third largest opposition party, Nippon Ishin no Kai, which is extremely keen to pass the bill. Although Komeito has long been cautious about lifting a ban on casinos, it is now inclined to at least allow parliamentary deliberations to be held on the legislation out of fear that its presence may decline amid speculation about deeper cooperation between the LDP and Nippon Ishin no Kai. However, not all Komeito Diet members are expected to endorse the legislation when it is put to a vote.

Diet deliberations on TPP to resume

Sunday morning's Asahi reported that the board of the Lower House special committee on TPP agreed on Friday to push back the date for a regional hearing on the TPP from Oct. 24 to 26, adding that both the Democratic Party and the Japanese Communist Party have agreed to return to Diet deliberations. The two opposition parties refused to attend Diet deliberations on Friday in protest of remarks made by Farm Minister Yamamoto.

INTERNATIONAL

Trump would withdraw from TPP on first day in White House

Several Monday papers reported that Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump delivered a speech in Gettysburg on Saturday to lay out the agenda for his first 100 days in the White House if he is elected. He disclosed that he would announce the United States' withdrawal from the TPP on his very first day in office.

JBIC to provide independent financing for Russian bank

Saturday morning's Nikkei gave top play to a report that the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) will provide financing to Sberbank of Russia by the end of this year. The paper

said JBIC will independently lend about 4 billion yen to the Russian bank, adding that JBIC usually provides joint financing together with private-sector partners. Noting that Sberbank is subject to economic sanctions imposed on Russia by the U.S. and EU, the paper wrote that Japan is hoping to lay the groundwork for the resolution of the Northern Territories issue by offering financial assistance to Russia ahead of the Japan-Russia summit in December.

The paper wrote in a separate article that although the financing is aimed at encouraging President Putin to make a decision on the territorial issue, it could cast a shadow over the unity of the G7 members. The paper added that it remains to be seen whether progress will be made in the territorial talks as a result of Japan's financial assistance to Russia.

Russia's upper house speaker to visit Nagasaki

Sunday morning's Mainichi reported that it learned from several diplomatic sources that Russia's Federation Council Chairperson Matviyenko will visit Nagasaki during her stay in Japan from Oct. 31 to Nov. 3. Noting that she is a close aide to President Putin, the paper said Moscow is apparently seeking to highlight Japan-Russia rapprochement and drive a wedge between Japan and the U.S. by criticizing the U.S. atomic bombing. Matviyenko is also expected to meet with Upper House President Date in Tokyo on Nov. 1 and make a courtesy call on PM Abe before going to Nagasaki.

Comfort women statue installed at university in Shanghai

Sunday morning's Asahi and Mainichi reported that a statue of two girls symbolizing the comfort women was installed at Shanghai Normal University on Saturday. According to university officials, the statue was created by Chinese and South Korean artists and presented to the university. While there is a similar statue in Seoul, it is the first time for such a statue to be installed in China, according to the officials.

Japanese firm wins chemical plant equipment contract in Iran

Monday's Sankei reported that major trading firm Marubeni has won a business contract to export pipes, compressors, and other equipment for use at plants operated by Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries Co., Iran's largest chemical goods manufacturer. The business deal, which is worth almost \$35 billion, is the biggest contract that any Japanese company has sealed with the Iranians since Western sanctions were imposed in 2006. The papers said many Japanese corporations are stepping up lobbying to make inroads into Iran, as they are lagging behind European, Chinese, and Korean companies in resuming business there following the lifting of sanctions in January this year.

SECURITY

U.S., Japan to carry out first joint military exercise reflecting security legislation

Saturday morning's Nikkei reported on an announcement by MOD on Friday that the first joint military training between the U.S. and Japan reflecting the security legislation will be held in early

November. The paper said the exercise will be based on a situation that could have a serious impact on Japan's peace and security.

In a related development, all Monday dailies wrote that PM Abe delivered remarks during an SDF parade in Saitama on Sunday, during which he referred to the security laws and said: "The SDF will be assigned new missions under the legislation. Those missions are intended to preserve precious peace and pass it on to future generations. I want you to keep this in mind so as to build robust SDF as a guardian of peace." Nikkei added that a U.S. Osprey made a celebratory flight in the parade.

Japan, U.S., ROK conduct search and rescue training off Cheju Island

This morning's Tokyo Shimbun wrote that four warships and four aircraft from the navies of the U.S., Japan, and South Korea carried out a maritime search and rescue drill off Cheju Island over the weekend, noting that this was the first trilateral training of its kind in almost four years. The joint training was resumed as a result of improved relations between Tokyo and Seoul.

Japan, South Korea to hold first talks on cybersecurity

Saturday morning's Asahi reported that Japan and South Korea will hold a meeting on cybersecurity at the end of this month in Seoul, saying that the two nations are hoping to build confidence in the field of cybersecurity and discuss measures to be taken. The paper said this is the first time for the two nations to hold a bilateral meeting on cybersecurity, adding that it is also aimed at exchanging information on North Korea's cyberattacks. Foreign ministry officials from both nations are expected to participate in the meeting.

Osprey test flight to be carried out in Saga in early November

Sunday morning's Asahi reported that in connection with the plan to deploy SDF Ospreys at Saga Airport, MOD Kyushu Defense Bureau announced on Friday that it will conduct an Osprey test flight in the vicinity of the airport on Nov. 8. The test flight will be carried out at the request of Saga Governor Yamaguchi, who was responding to a call from local residents for noise assessment. The MOD is hoping that conducting the test flight prior to the prefectural assembly session scheduled to begin in late November will help facilitate the smooth deployment of 17 Ospreys in FY2019 or later.

Osprey to fly in Kisarazu on Monday

Sankei reported on Friday evening that the Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Agency under the MOD announced on Friday that an MV-22 Osprey will fly in the vicinity of the GSDF's Camp Kisarazu in Chiba on Oct. 24 in order to compare the noise generated by the Osprey with that of the GSDF CH-47 helicopters currently deployed at the camp. The noise assessment will be carried out at the request of the city of Kisarazu. The paper said Camp Kisarazu has been designated a regular maintenance site for MV-22 Ospreys and is expected to also provide maintenance for the Ospreys to be deployed for the GSDF from 2020.

Okinawa Marine arrested for DUI

Today's Tokyo Shimbun wrote briefly in its city news section that the local police arrested a 40-year-old Marine belonging to Camp Hansen early on Sunday on charges of drunk driving in Chatan, Okinawa Prefecture. The suspect has been denying the allegation.

GOJ to withdraw one MSDF ship deployed to Somalia

Sunday morning's Asahi reported that the GOJ has decided to decrease from two to one the number of MSDF escort ships deployed in waters off Somalia for anti-piracy measures. The paper said the vessel that will be withdrawn from Somalia is expected to conduct warning and surveillance activities against a possible missile launch by North Korea. The paper said the Cabinet is expected to make a decision on the matter by the end of this month.

SCIENCE

Japan not planning to propose resumption of commercial whaling at IWC meeting

Sunday's Asahi reported that Japan will not propose resuming its commercial whaling at the International Whaling Commission meeting slated to begin on Oct. 24 in Slovenia. The paper said the gap between Japan and anti-whaling nations remains wide and no major progress can be expected at this year's IWC meeting. Noting that 28 years have passed since Japan stopped conducting commercial whaling, the paper said officials are increasingly alarmed at the decline in public interest in the issue. The daily wrote that since Japan's proposal to resume commercial whaling has been turned down at every meeting, Japan will instead ask other IWC member states for their opinions on how to proceed with discussions on commercial whaling.

